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AUTHOR	Peters, Michael
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ABSTRACT

Jean-Francois Lyotard is considered by many as the pre-eminent non-Marxist philosopher of the "postmodern condition." This paper offers Lyotard's intellectual biography, describes his political writings and subsequent turn to philosophy, and discusses his views on capitalism in the postmodern condition and the problem of the legitimation of knowledge. Lyotard offers a critical account of the status of knowledge and education in the postmodern condition that focuses on the most highly developed societies. The major working hypothesis of "The Postmodern Condition" is "that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (1984:3). Specifically, Lyotard maintains that the leading sciences and technologies have all been based on language-related developments and their miniaturization and commercialization. In this context, the status of knowledge is permanently altered: its availability as an international commodity becomes the basis for national and commercial advantage within the global economy; its computerized uses in the military provide the basis for enhanced state security and international monitoring. Knowledge has already become the principal force of production, changing the composition of the work force in developed countries. Educational theory should seek to critique existing metanarratives that legitimize education in universal terms. At the same time it must respect the culturally specific formations of plural forms of oppression at the intersections of class, race, and gender. (Contains 67 references.) (LMI)

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LYOTARD, EDUCATION AND THE PROBLEM OF CAPITALISM IN THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

Michael Peters

School of Education
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
New Zealand

Tel. 64-9-373 7599 Ext. 5044
Email: ma.peters@auckland.ac.nz

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Lyotard, Education And The Problem Of Capitalism In The Postmodern Condition

Michael Peters

> Inasmuch as there was in Marxism a discourse which claimed to be able to express without residue all opposing positions, which forgot that differends are embodied in incommensurable figures between which there is no logical solution it became necessary to stop speaking this idiom at all. . .
>
> J.-F. Lyotard, "A Memorial for Marxism", *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 61.

> One hears talk everywhere that the great problem of society is that of the state. This is a mistake, and a serious one. The problem that overshadows all others, including that of the contemporary state, is that of capital.
>
> J.-F. Lyotard, "A Svelte Appendix to the Postmodern Question". In: *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p. 25.

1. Introduction: Intellectual Biography

Jean-François Lyotard is considered by most commentators, justly or not, as the pre-eminent non-Marxist philosopher of 'the postmodern condition' (sometimes referred to as 'postmodernity'). His *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*

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(1984) originally published in Paris in 1979, became an instant *cause célèbre*. The book crystallised in an original interpretation a study of the status and development of knowledge, science and technology in advanced capitalist societies. *The Postmodern Condition* was important for a number of reasons. It developed a philosophical interpretation of the changing state of knowledge, science and education in the most highly developed societies, reviewing and synthesising research on contemporary science within the broader context of the sociology of postindustrial society and studies of postmodern culture. Lyotard brought together for the first time diverse threads and previously separate literatures in an analysis which many commentators and critics believed to signal an epochal break not only with the so-called 'modern era' but also with various traditionally 'modern' ways of viewing the world.

The Postmodern Condition as a single work, considered on its own merits, is reason enough for educationalists to devote time and effort to understanding and analysing Lyotard's major working hypothesis: "that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (1984: 3). He uses the term 'postmodern condition' to describe the state of knowledge and the problem of its legitimation in the most highly developed societies. In this he follows sociologists and critics who have used the term to designate the state of Western culture "following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literaure and the arts" (Lyotard, 1984: 3). Lyotard places these transformations within the context of the crisis of narratives, especially those Enlightenment metanarratives concerning

meaning, truth and emancipation which have been used to legitimate both the rules of knowledge of the sciences and the foundations of modern institutions.

By "transformations" Lyotard is referring to the effects of the new technologies since the 1950s and their combined impact on the two principal functions of knowledge -- research and the transmission of learning. Significantly, he maintains, the leading sciences and technologies have all been based on language-related developments -- theories of linguistics, cybernetics, informatics, computer languages, telematics, theories of algebra -- and their miniaturisation and commercialisation. In this context, Lyotard argues that the status of knowledge is permanently altered: its availability as an international commodity becomes the basis for national and commercial advantage within the global economy; its computerised uses in the military is the basis for enhanced State security and international monitoring. Knowledge, as he acknowledges, has already become the principal force of production, changing the composition of the workforce in developed countries. The commercialisation of knowldge and its new forms of media circulation, he suggests, will raise new ethico-legal problems between the nation-state and the information-rich multinationals, as well as widening the gap between the so-called developed and Third worlds.

Here is a *critical* account theorising the status of knowledge and education in the postmodern condition which focuses upon the most highly developed societies. It constitutes a seminal contribution and important point of departure to what has become known -- in part due to Lyotard's work -- as the modernity/postmodernity

debate, a debate which has involved many of the most prominent contemporary philosophers and social theorists (see Peters, 1996).

It is a book which directly addresses the concerns of education, perhaps, more so than any other single 'poststructuralist' text. It does so in a way which bears on the future status and role of education and knowledge in what has proved to be a prophetic analysis. Many of the features of Lyotard's analysis of the 'postmodern condition' -- an analysis over fifteen years old -- now appear to be accepted aspects of our experiences in Western societies.

And yet Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* should not be allowed to overshadow or obscure his other works or their significance for educational theory. Lyotard has written in the order of twenty books and many scholarly articles, spanning a range of philosophical fields, themes, styles and topics.[1] Nor should the focus on one text, however intellectually fashionable, obscure the emphasis on Lyotard's on-going political and pedagogical engagement in a career spanning more than four decades.

Jean-Francois Lyotard was born in 1924 at Versailles and he taught philosophy in secondary schools from 1949 to 1959. He taught at universities at Nanterre and Vincennes. Later he secured a post as professor of philosophy at the University of Paris VIII (Saint-Denis) which he held until his retirement in 1989. He was also

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professor of philosophy at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris, and professor of French and Italian at the University of California at Irvine.

Lyotard had been an active member of the radical Marxist group *Socialisme ou barbarie* for some ten years from 1954 to 1964. Thereafter he joined another radical group, *Pouvoir ouvrier*, only to leave two years later. These twelve years represent the years of his active political involvement. From 1955 onwards, while a member of *Socialisme ou barbarie*, Lyotard was assigned responsibility for the Algerian section. His accounts of the anti-imperialist struggle in Algeria, as Bill Readings (1993: xiii) argues, "provide a useful empirical corrective to charges that poststructuralism is an evasion of politics, or that Lyotard's account of the postmodern condition is a blissful ignorance of the postcolonial question".[2] After 1966 Lyotard discontinues his active political affiliation with any radical Marxist group and, indeed, this break, autobiographically speaking, represents intellectually, on the one hand, a break with Marxism and, on the other, a turn to philosophy.

Lyotard's break with Marxism and his turn to philosophy has to be seen against the background of French intellectual life and, in particular, the struggle in the late 1950s and early 1960s against both humanism in all its forms and Marxism. Structuralism, based upon the the work in linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, and many others, first found a home in a form of cultural anthropology pursued by Claude Lévi-Strauss and developed also in the disciplines of history (early Michel

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Foucault), semiotics (Roland Barthes), psychoanalysis (Jaques Lacan), and Marxism (Louis Althusser). Structuralism, at least as it was understood by Foucault, constituted, above all, a reaction against the phenomenological (existential or humanist) subject which had dominated French philosophy in the post-war period. Poststructuralism was inspired by a return to Nietzsche's writings and captured Gille Deleuze's (1962) hugely influential *Nietzsche et la philosophie*. Alan Schrift points out that "poststructuralism" is not a theory with a uniform set of shared assumptions, rather it is "a loose association of thinkers" who draw upon a variety of sources, the most significant of which is Nietzsche.

> Nietzsche's critique of truth, his emphasis on interpretation and the differential relations of power and knowledge, and his attention to questions of style in philosophical discourse have become central motifs within the works of the poststructuralists, who have developed these Nietzschean themes in a number of ways: by attending to questions of language, power, and desire in ways that emphasize the content in which meaning is produced while making problematic all universal truth and meaning claims; by challenging the assumptions that give rise to binary, oppositional thinking, often opting to affirm that which occupies a position of subordination within a differential network; by questioning the figure of the humanistic human subject, challenging the assumptions of autonomy and transparent self-consciousness while situating the subject as a complex intersection of discursive, libidinal, and social forces and practices; by resisting the impulse toward claims of universality and unity, preferring instead to acknowledge difference and fragmentation (Schrift, 1995: 6-7).

Lyotard's position in this new French Nietzsche is not at all straightforward. In an interview with Lyotard (1994b: 67), Richard Beadsworth begins with the question of the importance of Nietzsche in Lyotard's work of the 1970s and the turn to Kant and Wittgenstein, together with the sudden absence of Nietzsche thereafter. Lyotard resists this interpretation, suggesting that *Libidinal Economy* is predominantly a struggle with Freud, and while Lyotard acknowledges that he was greatly impressed by Pierre Klossowski's reading of Nietzsche in *Le Cercle Vicieux*, Beardsworth's attempt to "push Nietzsche" is misplaced. He suggests that his relations with Nietzsche "have always been a series of beginnings" (p. 90) and signals the difference of his relation to Nietzsche compared with Deleuze, who as "a metaphysician of energy", is truly inspired by Nietzsche.

The place of Lyotard's political writings in the corpus of his work is a complex question which defies any simple recounting of publication dates. For instance, Lyotard has remarked that *The Postmodern Condition*, in the eyes of his critics, has occluded his other works: that it was marked by a certain sociology and epistemology rather than philosophy; and that the philosophical basis of *The Postmodern Condition* is to be found in *The Differend* (1988a). While one can name the specific genres that constitute Lyotard's writings -- the philosophical, the epistemological, genres of criticism, linguistics, narrative, intellectual autobiography, and aesthetics -- politics, as he says, is more complex than a genre, combining "discursive genres (but also phrase-regimes) which are totally heterogenous" (Lyotard, 1988b: 299).

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Lyotard (1988b), in an interview with Willem van Reijen and Dick Veerman, suggests that "the essential philosophical task will be to refuse [. . .] the complete aestheticization of the political" (ibid.) which he maintains is characteristic of modern politics. By 'aestheticization' Lyotard means an active fashioning or shaping of the community or polity according to the idea of reason. Lyotard in his *Political Writings*, then, addresses the crisis of "the end of the political"[3], that is, "of all attempts to moralize politics which were incarnated in Marxism" (Lyotard, 1988b: 300). This means, as Readings (1993: xviii) suggests, that Lyotard's political writings are characterised by a "resistance to modern universalism" by an argument against what may be called the "politics of redemption". What we are presented with in Lyotard's work, as an alternative, is a politics of resistance, a form of writing which offers resistance to established modes of thought and accepted opinion. The same form of writing also registers an on-going internal struggle or resistance, characterised by the differend between early and later modes of thinking and, crucially, by Lyotard's differend with Marxism itself.

Dick Veerman (1988: 271) asserts that Lyotard's philosophical writings divide into two main periods:

> The doctoral thesis *Discours, figure* (1971) opens the first period. *Economie libidinale* (1974) closes it. In the intervening period Lyotard published *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* and *Des Dispositifs* (both 1973), two collections of essays written between 1963 and 1973. From 1975 onwards we can speak of the

second period. Amongst its most important articles and books I count the following: *Instructions païennes* (1977), *Au juste* (1979, converstaions with Jean-Loup Thebaud), *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?' (1982), 'Judicieux dans le différend' (1982, published 1985), *Le Differend* (1983), L'Enthousiasme, la critique kantienne de l'historie (1986), 'Grundlagenkrise' (1986), 'Sensus communis' (1987), 'L'Intérêt du sublime' (1987) and *Que peindre?* (1987).[4]

We can add to the first period *La Phenomenologie*, published in 1954 and translated into English in 1991, and we can add substantially to the second period: *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (1988c), *Heidegger and "the Jews"* (1990), *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1991), *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (1992),), *Political Writings* (1993a), *Lessons of Darkness* (1993b), *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's Critique of Judgement* (1994a).

Already in his early works, *Discours, figure* and *Economie libidinale*, Lyotard signalled a conscious shift away from the doctrinaire *praxis* philosophy which characterised the non-PCF Marxism tradition of *Socialisme ou barbarie*. The former work attempts to develop a metaphysics of truth without negation; the latter attempts to substitute Freud's economy of libidinal energy (and the notion of primary process) for Marxist political economy. In this situation there is no truth arrived at through dialectics: the supposed ethical and social truths of Marxism, based upon an appeal to

an historical ideal, are no better than the falsehoods it wants to overcome. Lyotard (1974) criticises the underlying notion of the dialectic. He simply does not believe that a political, philosophical, or artistic position is to be abandoned because it is "sublated". It is not true, according to Lyotard, that the experience of a position means its inevitable exhaustion and necessary development into another position where it is both conserved and suppressed. Veerman (1988: 272) suggests that the upshot of Lyotard's metaphysics in his first period is simply that : "we cannot take one political stand rather than another, since the correct one cannot be decided".[5]

2. Politics and the Turn to Philosophy

Lyotard's differend with Marxism and specifically with *Socialisme ou barbarie* and Pierre Souyri, in particular, is recounted in "A Memorial of Marxism: For Pierre Souyri", a rare autobiographical piece.[6] He describes how, in the language of radical Marxism, dialectical logic had become a simple idiom and how "the machinery for overcoming alterity by negating and conserving it" for him had broken down, precipitating a "relapse" into the logic of identity. He writes of his own intellectual biography of the time:

> And what if, after all, the philosopher asked himself, there wasn't any Self at all in experience to synthesize contradictorily the moments and thus to achieve knowledge and realization of itself? What if history and thought did not need this synthesis; what if the paradoxes had to remain paradoxes, and if the equivocacy of these universals which are also particulars, must not be sublated?

> What if Marxism itself were in its turn one of those particular universals which it was not even a question of going beyond -- an assumption that is still too dialectical -- but which it was at the very least a question of refuting in its claim to absolute universality, all the while according it a value in its own order? But what then, in what order, and what is an order? These questions frightened me in themselves because of the formidable theoretical tasks they promised, and also because they seemed to condemn anyone who gave himself over to them to the abandonment of any militant practice for an indeterminate time (1988c: 50).

What was at stake for Lyotard after twelve years of a commitment to radical Marxism was whether Marxism could "still understand and transform the new direction taken by the world after the end of the Second World War" (ibid.: 49). Capitalism had succeeded in surviving the crisis of the thirties. The proletariat had not seized the opportunity to overturn the old order. On the contrary, modern capitalism, once its market and production capacities had been restored, had set up new relations of exploitation and taken on new forms. Lyotard lists the following the new realities confronting Marxism: "the reorganization of capitalism into bureaucratic or State monopolistic capitalism; the role of the modern State in the so-called mixed economy; the dynamics of the new ruling strata (bureaucratic or technocratic) within the bourgeoisie; the impact of the new techniques on work conditions and on the mentality of workers and employees; the effects of economic growth on daily life and culture; the appearance of new demands by workers and the possibility of conflicts between the base and the appratus in worker organizations" (ibid.: 66).

While Lyotard recognises that there are several incommensurable genres of discourse in play in society, none can transcribe all others; and yet, nevertheless, one of them -- that of capital -- imposes its rules on others and attempts to make all discourse commensurable. As he says: "This oppression is the only radical one, the one that forbids its victims to bear witness against it. It is not enough to understand it and be its philosopher; one must also destroy it" (ibid.: 72).

Lyotard was at the University of Nanterre during the events of May 1968 and his political activism centered on the struggle against the modernising tendency -- new selection methods and changed conditions to the baaccalereat examination -- of Fouchet's reforms, which comprised the demand for democratisation and, in doing so, severly underestimated the student's desire for genuine participation.[7] Themes that were to surface later in Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* find their source here: in critique of a class monopolisation of knowledge and the mercantilisation of knowledge and education; in an attack on the "heirarchic magisterial relation" of pedagogy; in the refusal of a kind of education under capitalism which merely socially reproduces students to fulfill the technical demands of the system; and in the expression of a moral ideal embodied in non-dialectical forms of dialogue as the ethical precondition for pedgogy.[8]

3. Capitalism in the Postmodern Condition[9]

The problem of capitalism, then, is one that has occupied Lyotard since his early political involvement with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and consistently thereafter in his 'post-Marxist' writings. He argues, for instance, in "A Svelte Appendix to the Postmodern Question" (1993d), "Capitalism is one of the names of modernity", and continues in a vein highly reminescent of *The Postmodern Condition*:

> capitalism has been able to subordinate to itself the infinite desire for knowledge that animates the sciences, and to submit its achievements to its own criterion of technicity: the rule of performance that requires the endless optimalization of the cost benefit (input output) ratio (Lyotard, 1993d: 27).

Lyotard thus speaks of the "penetration of capitalism into language", "the transformation of language into a productive commodity" which reduces phrases to encoded messages with an exchange value -- information which can be stored, retrieved, packaged, calculated, and transmitted. Lyotard acknowledges his debt to Marx and yet remains within the ambit of a commodification thesis (albeit as a *representational* system) as one of the main processes of rationalisation which guides the development of the system as a whole: the Marxian analysis of commodity fetish as it applies to knowledge and education. He recognizes the way in which the logic of performance, aimed at maximizing the overall efficiency of the system, generates socio-economic contradictions, but he parts company with Marxists on the possibility of emancipation or of salvation expected to arise automatically from these contradictions. He jettisons what Readings (1993: xxiv) calls the "politics of redemption" based upon "the Marxist desire to identify alienation as a reversible ideological distortion" in order to rethink politics and resistance in "minoritarian"

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terms, which forgoes an authoritative reading of events based on determinate judgements, to respect the differend and "to think justice in relation to conflict and difference" that admit of no resolution. "Our role as thinkers" in the situation of postmodernity, Lyotard (1993d: 27) suggests, "is to deepen what language there is, to critique the shallow notion of information, to reveal an irremediable opacity within language itself". The issue for Lyotard is one of understanding and providing a critique of capitalist forms of the insinuation of will into reason and the way this is manifest primarily in language.

This is a question he addresses clearly in *The Postmodern Condition* in terms of the performativity principle which, he suggests, reduces difference, ignores the differend, and treats all language games as commensurable, and the whole as determinable. The logic of performance, of optimizing the system's overall performance, based on the criterion of efficiency, does violence to the heterogeneity of language games and "necessarily involves a certain level of terror: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear". The notion of performance and its criterion of efficiency is technological, it can not provide us with a rule for judging what is true or just or beautiful. Here, then, is a trenchant critique of capitalism, of capitalism's penetration of language, and of the way thought is managed, packaged, and commodified in the new postmodern technologies which, for Lyotard, express the most recent application of capitalist rules to language.

4. The Problem of the Legitimation of Knowledge

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It is a critique that leads us back to the central question of legitimation of knowledge and education. If the Enlightenment idealist and humanist metanarratives have become bankrupt and the State and Corporation must abandon or renounce them, wherein can legitimacy reside? Lyotard, in his critique of capitalism, suggests that the State has found its only credible goal in power. Science and education are to be legitmated, in de facto terms, through the principle of performativity, that is, through the logic of maximisation of the system's performance, which becomes self-legitimating in Luhmann's sense.

It is this account which has proved so potent in prophesying and analysing the changes to economic and social policy which have taken place in the Western world with the ascendancy of the so-called "new right". Education, not so long ago regarded as a universal welfare right under a social democratic model, has been recast as a leading sub-sector of the economy and one of the main enterprises of the future "postindustrial" economy. Lyotard's (1984) *The Postmodern Condition* provides an understanding and critique of the neo-liberal marketisation of education in terms of the systemic, self-regulatory nature of global capitalism.[10] His concern is that Critical Theory, based upon the traditional critique of political economy, has been used as a way of reprogramming the system. Lyotard claims that Critical Theory has lost its theoretical standing and been reduced to a utopia. In Lyotard's terms Critical Theory,

especially in the hands of Habermas, is still committed to the universal categories of reason and the subject -- albeit the minimal intersubjective subject of communication -- based upon the paradigm of mutual understanding. These universal categories, established through the principle of consensus, do not respect the differend. Where Habermas adheres to an ideal of transparent communication, Lyotard investigates the differend inherent in language. Where Habermas stresses the harmonious aspects of consensus, Lyotard holds that consensus can only be established on the basis of acts of exclusion. It is hard to imagine a view of language or discourse which is more removed from Habermas' ideal of a universal norm of communicative action which is said to be immanent in speech itself and which allegedly enables participants to arrive at consensus without distortion or external constraint.

In the Preface to the English translation of Lyotard's (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*, Frederic Jameson notes how Lyotard's text was, among other things, "also a thinly veiled polemic against Jürgen Habermas' concept of a 'legitimation crisis' and vision of a 'noisefree' transparent, fully communicational society" (Jameson 1984:vii). Jameson is alluding to the way in which Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* is, above all, a critique of Enlightenment metanarratives or *grand récits*. Lyotard wants to question the dogmatic basis of these metanarratives, their "terroristic" and violent nature, which in asserting certain "Truths" from the perspective of an authorised discourse, does so only by silencing or excluding statements from another.

Lyotard, in a now often quoted passage, uses the term 'modern'

> to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse . . . making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of

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the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth (Lyotard 1984:xxiii).

In contrast, he defines 'postmodern' elliptically as "incredulity toward metanarratives" by which he means to point to "the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation" to which corresponds "the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution . . ."

Lyotard seeks to demonstrate how the metanarrative legitimation function has been broken down and dispersed into a heterogeneity of language elements comprising incommensurable modes of discourse, each with its own irreducible set of rules. In a creative misappropriation of Wittgenstein, Lyotard develops a general conception of language as an agonistics where "to speak is to fight" and this conception is elevated as a model for understanding society in general.

Lyotard's (1984) work, historically, challenges the two grand Hegelian metanarratives -- the emancipation of humanity and the speculative unity of knowledge -- which underly the philosophical tradition to which Habermas belongs. Lyotard's indirect assault is against the concept of 'totality' -- he elsewhere, announces "a war against totality" -- and the notion of autonomy as it underlies the sovereign subject. His line of argument, therefore, is an apparent confrontation with Habermas' notion of a rational society modelled on communicational processes where so-called validity claims immanent in ordinary conversation can be discursively redeemed at the level of discourse. In this realm and vision of a 'transparent' communicational society moral and practical claims are said to be

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resolved rationally and consensually without distortion or coercion. Claims are said to be resolved through only the force of pure argumentation itself. For Lyotard, this conception represents the latest, perhaps last, attempt at building a 'totalizing' philosophy -- one which depends on driving together, albeit in an original way, the two, grand Hegelian metanarratives which, themselves, are under suspicion. The 'totalizing', emacipatory vision of a 'transparent' communication society, by invoking a quasi-transcendentalism and ideal of consensus, is both 'terroristic' and exclusory.

Habermas responds to Lyotard's charges by focusing on the alleged conservatism of the poststructuralist position. Habermas' (1981) initial response is given in a lecture he delivers in 1980 as an acceptance of the Adorno prize. The lecture, "Modernity versus Postmodernity", is deliberately framed within an exhaustive binary opposition which is the hallmark of classical reason. He identifies himself as the defender of "the project of modernity" against the 'anti-modern' sentiments of a line of French 'poststructuralist' philosophers "running from Bataille to Derrida by way of Foucault", and he compares the critique of reason of these philosophers to the "Young Conservatives" of the Weimar Republic.

Habermas' typology distinguishes the 'anti-modernism' of the "Young Conservatives" from the 'premodernism' of the "old conservatives"; and from the "postmodernism" of the "neoconservatives", while hinting at a new ideological shift which focuses on an alliance of the postmodernists with premodernists. By contrast, Habermas (1981:12) situates himself (and Adorno) in a relation to the "project of

modernity" to learn "from the mistakes of these extraveagant programs which have tried to negate modernity".

Richard Rorty attempts to explain the difference between Lyotard and Habermas in the following terms.

> From Lyotard's point of view, Habermas is offering one more meta-narrative, a more general and abstract "narrative of emancipation" from the Freudian and Marxian meta-narratives. For Habermas, the problem posed by incredulity towards meta-narratives is that unmasking only makes sense if we "preserve at least one standard for (the) explanation of the corruption of *all* reasonable standards". If we have no such standard, one which escapes a "totalising self-referential critique", then distinctions between the naked and the masked, or between theory and ideology, lose their force (Rorty 1985:161).

For Habermas, to accept Lyotard's argument would be to strip ideology-critique of its principal function. Unless there is a universal metadiscourse the possibility of legitimizing validity claims in a theoretical manner disappears. Yet for Lyotard, seemingly, the very opposite appears to be the case. Universal metadiscourses cannot theoretically effect a closure: practically and empirically they betray their own ahistoricism in the experiences of recent contemporary history (e.g. the Gulags, Auschwitz, May 1968). As van Reijen (1990: 97) comments, "Lyotard accuses Habermas of wanting to revive the terror of reason."

Lyotard's (1984: xxv) response to this state of affairs is to emphasize legitimation by paralogy:

> Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy.

In contrast to the models of legitimation based on the principle of consensus Lyotard suggests a kind of legitimation based on difference understood as paralogy. Against the possibility of consensus either defined as dialogical agreement between rational minds (based on the narrative of emancipation) or as the logic of maximum performance, Lyotard (1984: 60) theorizes the legitimation of postmodern science in terms of paralogy, where "the little narrative remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention". Paralogy includes the study of open systems, local determinism, antimethod. It is what Readings (1993: xxi) calls "the pragmatics of discursive legitimation" and what Lyotard (1984: 60) explains in the following terms:

> Postmodern science -- by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, "*fracta*", catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes -- is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical.

Lyotard stands against the legitimation of education in terms of either consensus or performance. The first form of legitimation -- consensus -- is based on a reductive homogenisation of interests which produces in a single overiding, transparent and dialectical conclusion, an inversion of the capitalist hierarchy of values and class positions. The other form of legitimation is an equally "monological" version based upon the performance of a system as a whole. Both forms of legitimation offer the

promise of utopia (literally "no place"), in terms of a metanarrative -- a single master language and reason according to which the political community must be shaped. By contrast, if we view the question of paralogy as being linked to a version of education, in accordance with Lyotard, we might begin to bear witness to the differend, to a form of education based on difference, where the little narratives, still largely unwritten, are not forced to resolve themselves into a monologue or into one reigning metanarrative. On Lyotard's account, educational theory should seek to critique and dethrone existing metanarratives which function to legitimise education in universal terms. At the same time it must respect the culturally specific formations of plural forms of oppression at the intersections of class, race and gender as they make up a set of fragmented social bonds.

Endnotes

[1] A full bibliography of Lyotard's major works is given at the end of the chapter, along with a list of works discussing his philosophy. All works are given in English translation where available, otherwise the original French edition is referred. For a bibliography his work and secondary sources up until 1991 see Nordquist (1991).

[2] For a selection of Lyotard's essays on Algeria see his *Political Writings* (1993) which provide something of an intellectual biography detailing, for instance, his involvement and thoughts on May 1968 and his relation to student matters. For a review of *Political Writings* see Peters (1994)

[3] This is the title of Bill Readings' provocative Foreword to Lyotard's *Political Writings*.

[4] I have referenced Lyotard's works as they appear in the text. This accounts for any differences between my bibliography of Lyotard's work and Veerman's. Veerman subdivides Lyotard's writing into two periods without further comment. I guess that he separates the second period from the first in terms of a move away from questions of Marxist political theory *per se* towards more overtly poststructuralist concerns.

[5] This is a question that Lyotard pursues throughout his second period: the question of justice. He says in *The Differend* (1988: xi), for example: "As distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that

cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments".

[6] This essay appears as an afterword in *Peregrinations* (1988c), pp. 45-75. Pierre Souyri was both a friend and a founding member of *Socialisme ou barbarie*. In the essay Lyotard explores his differend with Souyri.

[7] For an historical account of the French educational reforms of this period and for differences between Lyotard's and Foucault's responses to the changes, see James Marshall (1995). Marshall elaborates Lyotard's involvement with the events of May 1968 at Nanterre in terms of Lyotard's notion of 'apedagogy' which, as Marshall suggests, "required reciprocal relations of a nonmanipulative kind" (p. 186).

[8] For an excellent essay which explores Lyotard's suggestion of nondialectical forms of pedagogy see Bill Readings (1995).

[9] Material for this section is based upon a section of my "Introduction: Lyotard, Education and the Postmodern Condition" (Peters, 1995).

[10] See my "Performance and Accountability in 'Post-industrial Society': The Crisis of British Universities" (Peters, 1992); "Re-reading Touraine: Postindustrialism and the Future of the University" (Peters, 1991); and "The Marketization of Tertiary Education in New Zealand" (Peters, Marshall & Parr, 1993).

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